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SUBJECT: GOE'S NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL REORGANIZED WITH
EMPHASIS ON FAMILY PLANNING

1. (U) SUMMARY: The GOE recently announced the reorganization of Egypt's National Population Council (NPC) to coordinate GOE-led family planning and population assistance activities. NPC programming has stagnated in past years as a result of weakened authority, inefficient bureaucracy, and a decline in donor funding. The new Prime Minister and minister-level leadership of the NPC, supported

by an experienced executive committee, signals GOE recognition of the importance of population planning and assistance programs. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) In June President Mubarak issued a decree renewing the mandate and legal framework for Egypt's National Population Council (NPC). The decree elevates the NPC's role in addressing Egypt's population problem by appointing the prime minister to head the council and tapping ministers from key ministries to serve as members of the interagency body. Ministers participating include ministers of Economic Development, Information, Social Solidarity, Health and Population, and Local Development. The NPC will also have an executive committee, composed of leaders from two important support institutions and three high-ranking population experts, to facilitate the implementation of NPC programs. The new Executive Committee includes the former lead on USAID's Population Policy Project, the Head of the GOE's State Information Service, and the Chairman of the Egyptian Family Planning Association. In addition to its Headquarters, the NPC has a regional population council in each of Egypt's 26 governorates. Increased authority resulting from NPC membership at the ministerial level, in combination with population planning subject-matter experts, will increase opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and accountability between the GOE's different population-related ministries and regionally located staff. More importantly, it should also improve the ability of the NPC to operationalize its mandate.

3. (U) In a positive early sign, Prime Minister Nazif announced during his first meeting in June with the Executive Committee an increased budget for family planning, provided there is evidence of "results-based activities." This promising announcement continues the GOE's historical support of family planning programs. Since the 1970s, USAID-funded programs in cooperation with the GOE have played a major role in improving contraceptive prevalence among Egyptian women and population assistance in general. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has also actively supported population planning programs in Egypt. Sharp declines in USAID and UNFPA funding in recent years have shifted the financial burden of population-assistance programs to the GOE. Early indicators from the NPC's leadership suggest GOE commitment to continue funding these programs.

4. (U) Egypt's fertility rate has declined significantly over the last four decades, from over 7.2 children per woman in the early 1960s to 3.1 in 2000. However, current

population growth projections are still a source of concern for Egyptian policy makers. Overall, population in Egypt is expected to increase to 95.6 million in 2026, and reach 114.8 million in 2065. Egypt's current youth bulge portends future challenges to reducing the country's fertility rate due to a large proportion of girls who will soon reach reproductive age. United Nations estimates predict that by 2020 14.3 million women will be in prime childbearing ages, compared to 9.2 million in 1999. Moreover, population growth will be highest in the poorest regions of Egypt, calling for robust engagement by the NPC in under-served areas of Egypt.

15. (U) COMMENT: Past success in curbing Egypt's fertility rates highlight GOE commitment to family planning programming. Recent declines in donor funding for population-assistance activities present a challenge which the GOE is taking on by providing a new framework for NPC authority, activities, and funding. Given current demographic trends, successful family planning initiatives could have a positive effect on improved economic development, minimized health risks to women and children, greater access to social services, and curbing Egypt's unemployment level. END COMMENT.
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